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# THE DOG THAT FINALLY BARKED

ENGLAND AS AN EMERGING POLITICAL COMMUNITY

## REPORT

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Future of England (FoE) Survey which has been developed in partnership between Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre, Edinburgh University's Institute for Governance and IPPR. The FoE represents one of the most comprehensive examinations of English attitudes to questions of identity, nationhood and governance to date – and the only major survey in this area conducted in England since both the formation of a coalition government at Westminster and the election of a majority SNP administration in Holyrood.

It has long been predicted that devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would provoke an English 'backlash' against the anomalies and apparent territorial inequities of a devolved UK state. To the surprise of some, evidence of such a development was limited in the initial years of devolution. However, there are now signs that a stirring within England is beginning to take shape. The evidence presented here suggests the emergence of what might be called an 'English political community', one marked by notable concerns within England about the seeming privileges of Scotland, in particular, in a devolved UK, a growing questioning of the capacity of the current UK-level political institutions to pursue and defend English interests, and one underpinned by a deepening sense of English identity.

In respect of English attitudes to devolution and the union, the report finds that:

- The number of voters in England who believe that Scottish devolution has made the way Britain is governed worse (35 per cent) has doubled since 2007.
- The English increasingly believe they get a raw-deal from the devolved settlement, with 45 per cent of voters in England saying that Scotland gets 'more than its fair share of public spending' – the number agreeing with this has almost doubled since 2000. Meanwhile 40 per cent of voters in England say that England gets 'less than its fair share' of public money.
- 52 per cent of English respondents believe that Scotland's economy benefits more than England's from being in the UK, while less than one in four believe England and Scotland's economies benefit equally.
- While support for Scottish independence remains low – only 22 per cent say Scots should go it alone – the English strongly support the view that the current devolved settlement should be reformed. At fully 80 per cent, there is also overwhelming support in England for 'devolution-max' (full fiscal autonomy) for Scotland, with 44 per cent agreeing strongly. 79 per cent say Scottish MPs should be barred from voting on English laws, with an absolute majority agreeing strongly with that proposition.
- There has been a sharp rise since 2007 in the proportion of English voters who say they agree strongly with barring Scottish MPs from voting on English laws and 'devolution-max', which underlines the intensity of feeling now associated with these reforms.

In respect of English views on how they themselves are governed, the report finds that:

- Having initially been content to continue to be governed themselves by an unreformed set of UK institutions at Westminster, support for the status quo has now fallen to just one in four of the English electorate. 59 per cent say that they do not trust the UK government to work in the best long-term interests of England.
- English voters appear to want what we call an 'English dimension' to the country's politics – that is, distinct governance arrangements for England as a whole.

- At present, though, views as to what form this English dimension should take have yet to crystallise around a single alternative, with support divided between some form of ‘English votes on English laws’ and an English parliament.

In respect of trends in national identity, the report finds that:

- These changing views about how England should be governed are also being underpinned by changes in patterns of national identity in England. While a majority retain a dual sense of English and British identity, there is evidence to suggest that we are witnessing the emergence in recent decades of a different kind of Anglo-British identity, in which the English component is increasingly considered the primary source of attachment for the English.
- The proportion of the population that prioritise their English over their British identity (40 per cent) is now twice as large as that which prioritise their British over their English identity (16 per cent). 60 per cent of English respondents believe that the English have become more aware of Englishness in recent years.
- English identity appears to be stronger than British identity – or the English component of dual English-British identity stronger than the British component – across England’s diverse regions (including London) and across all social and demographic groups, with one exception: members of ethnic minorities, who place much greater emphasis on their British identity. The report, however, also points to tentative evidence of a growth in English identification within ethnic minority communities in recent years, albeit from a lower base.
- There is strong evidence that English identity is becoming politicised: that is, the more strongly English a person feels the more likely they are to believe that the current structure of the post-devolution UK is unfair and the more likely they are to support the development of an English dimension to the governance of England. The report argues that this finding is important precisely because the group that choose to emphasise their English over their British identity – and who feel most strongly about the case for reform – are an increasingly important constituency in English political life.

Finally the report highlights not only the failure of the mainstream political parties to take the English question seriously, but also the electorate’s belief that none of the parties stand up for English interests:

- More people believe that none of the parties stand up for the interests of England (23 per cent) than believe that either of the main political parties do.

The report concludes by arguing that ignoring the developments it highlights – growing popular dissatisfaction with the territorial status quo and support for an English dimension to the institutions of government – will not make them disappear. Especially given that they are buttressed not only by the workings of a system of asymmetric devolution that ensures that a de facto English polity is emerging ever more clearly into view, but also by changes in patterns of national identity. The latter are sure to be particularly consequential. Despite the exhortations of successive governments that have focused exclusively on Britishness, at the popular level it is Englishness that resonates most. These developments matter. In the view of the authors, the main problem is not that the English question is now finally being asked by the country’s electorate, but rather that the British political class has failed to take it, and them, seriously.

## INTRODUCTION: THE ENGLISH ENIGMA

**Inspector Gregory (Scotland Yard detective): ‘Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?’**

**Holmes: ‘To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.’**

**Inspector Gregory: ‘The dog did nothing in the night-time.’**

**Holmes: ‘That was the curious incident.’**

Arthur Conan Doyle, *Silver Blaze* (1892)

Devolution has transformed the government of the UK. Since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, Scotland has been governed by its own powerful parliament and government. While the Welsh National Assembly established in the same year was initially much weaker, following the March 2011 referendum, Wales also has its own legislature with extensive powers as well as its own Welsh government. After the interregnum of ‘direct rule’, Northern Ireland has also returned to a system of devolved government as part of the wider peace process. The result is that, across many of the most important areas of public policy, including health and education, the UK government is now, to all intents and purposes, the English government. In these same policy areas Westminster is a parliament whose effective writ runs only in England. As an unintended consequence of devolution, therefore, an English polity has (re)emerged as an incubus at the heart of the UK state. Yet, there have been few signs so far that these major shifts in the governance of the UK have been accompanied by an increased awareness of England as a political community in its own right.

During the years since 1999 – and, indeed, at various points during the preceding decades when devolution was on the political agenda – more or less dire warnings have been issued about the likely impact of all this on opinion in England. The people of England, it was claimed, would become increasingly resentful of the anomalies that inevitably arise in the context of a system of asymmetric devolution. The most striking of these is crystallised by the now famous and obviously rhetorical ‘West Lothian Question’: how can it be right that an MP representing West Lothian (or, for that matter, Carmarthen West or West Tyrone) can have a voice in determining, say, education policy in England, when, as a result of devolution, English MPs cannot influence education policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? In addition, it was suggested that English taxpayers would become increasingly aware and resentful of the fact that per capita levels of public spending are higher in the devolved territories than in England itself. Finally, it was also suggested that the English would respond to what were claimed to be increasingly assertive expressions of Scottish and Welsh national identity by turning their backs on Britishness and embracing an avowedly English identity – an identity which many seem to assume is somehow inherently more xenophobic and less inclusive (particularly of ethnic minorities) than British or indeed Scottish and Welsh identities.

In the early years of devolution, however, these fears appeared overstated: the available evidence suggested that the English remained blithely indifferent to it all. Curiously, for some at least, the English dog did not bark in the night. While generally supportive of devolution for Scotland and Wales, English voters remained firmly attached to the Westminster system of government themselves (as Labour was to discover during its abortive attempts to create regional assemblies in England.) As for difference in levels of public expenditure: the English may well have been mildly peeved but they certainly did not seem unduly perturbed. Moreover, even if badges of English identity such as the St George’s Cross had undoubtedly become more prevalent, the majority of the English population seemed to retain a general, undifferentiated sense of Englishness/Britishness

(the conflation of which had long been a running sore in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.) Certainly there was little sign that a strengthening of English self-awareness demanded or required expression through distinct English political institutions. If, as Jeremy Paxman once claimed, ‘the English have not spent a great deal of time defining themselves because they haven’t needed to’, then it appeared as if devolution had done little to change the situation.<sup>1</sup>

But if that was the story in the early years of devolution, there are good reasons to believe that this might slowly be beginning to change. For several years a recurrent theme in parts of the London press has been the alleged unfairness, not only of differences in relative levels of public spending across the UK, but also of the different bundles of free-at-the-point-of-delivery public services now available to citizens in different parts of the post-devolution UK. Survey and opinion poll evidence suggest that this has been matched by increasing resentment in England about public spending levels in Scotland, in particular.

Developments at the political level have also served to bring attitudes in England into sharper focus. Most obviously the re-election of a Scottish National Party (SNP) government in Scotland that believes it has a sufficient mandate to ensure that a referendum will be held on the possibility of either ‘devolution-max’ or full-blown independence raises the question of how English voters view these potentially monumental changes to the very nature of the UK state. Less dramatically, but also of potential consequence, is the current UK Coalition government’s decision to establish a commission ‘to consider’ the West Lothian question. While the length of time that it has taken to redeem this pledge suggests a certain reluctance to grasp the nettle, its very existence suggests a growing awareness that the anomalies created by asymmetric devolution cannot be ignored in perpetuity.

Finally, at the popular level, symbols of English national identity continue to proliferate, driven partly in response to devolution but also, in part, independent of it. Various polls and surveys provide tentative evidence that this is matched by an increasing tendency among the people of England to identify themselves primarily as English (while also as British).

This is clearly, therefore, an opportune time for a comprehensive look at attitudes in England towards:

- the way that the UK has developed politically post-devolution
- how England is and ought to be governed, and
- national identity – specifically the extent to which a resurgent sense of Englishness is being experienced uniformly across England’s regionally and socially diverse population and whether there are signs that a stirring of English self-consciousness is beginning to seek some form of political expression.

As mention of regions implies, it is not enough to treat England as one undifferentiated whole. An apparently commonplace belief is that, despite its very long history of centralised government, England remains a particularly diverse nation. Moreover, even if the differences between English regions may prove to be overstated, the position of London – now a highly cosmopolitan, world city – does raise obvious questions about the coherence of England as a political community. So, as well as surveying attitudes across England as a whole, it is important to be able to ‘drill down’ into some, at least, of England’s regions – including those in which we have *prima facie* expectations of strong regional identity and, perhaps, differentiation – in order to discover patterns of difference and commonality across the country.

In addition, as well as comparing attitudes within England, it is equally important to be able to locate England in a wider, comparative context: How do attitudes in England compare to attitudes across other nations and regions in western Europe?

In order to explore these issues, a research team comprised of researchers from Cardiff University’s Wales Governance Centre, Edinburgh University’s Institute of Governance and

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<sup>1</sup> Paxman J (1998) *The English: A Portrait of a People*, London: Michael Joseph



IPPR have cooperated on a unique Future of England (FoE) Survey. As well as harnessing the previous experience of the three collaborating institutions in undertaking survey and attitudes research in Wales, Scotland and England respectively, the research has also benefited from the key roles played by the Scottish and Welsh teams in the collaborative, pan-European research project that culminated in the fielding of the Citizenship after the Nation State (CANS) Survey in 14 European regions/nations in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

This report summarises the findings of the FoE survey. Having first provided a brief overview of the survey itself, the next section of the report, **Devolution: The view from England**, focuses on current attitudes in England towards the systems of devolved government that have developed in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In the subsequent section, **England emerges**, we report on changing attitudes in England towards the future government of England itself, and in particular, the increasing support for an ‘English dimension’ to the country’s politics. This is followed by an extended exploration of the coherence of **England as a nascent political community**, focusing on patterns of national identity within England, and in particular, the extent to which it can be said that there is a common sense of Englishness across the country’s different regions and social groups sufficient to underpin such an ‘English dimension’. Following from this we then turn to review **The political consequences of English identity**, focusing on the relationship between identity and constitutional preferences for the future of England. The report’s concluding section turns to England and the problem of British politics, namely the striking gap between what an increasingly large segment of the English population appear to want and what the political parties are currently prepared to offer them.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information about the CANS research see [http://www.institute-of-governance.org/major\\_projects/citizen\\_after\\_the\\_nation\\_state](http://www.institute-of-governance.org/major_projects/citizen_after_the_nation_state)

# 1. THE FUTURE OF ENGLAND SURVEY

The FoE survey represents one of the most comprehensive examinations of English attitudes to questions of identity, nationhood and governance to date – and the only major survey in this area conducted in England since both the formation of a coalition government at Westminster and the election of a majority SNP administration in Holyrood. It was undertaken on behalf of the research team by YouGov. Fieldwork was undertaken between 27 July and 2 August 2011. The total all-England sample size was 1,507 adults and the resulting figures have been weighted and are representative of the adult population of England. The survey was conducted using an online interview of administered members of the YouGov GB panel of 185,000-plus individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. YouGov uses its own proprietary system for sampling, designed by YouGov to ensure respondents are always able to take a survey. YouGov uses targeted quota sampling as opposed to random probability sampling. Using advanced analytical techniques and taking into account several key factors, YouGov's samples are most frequently assigned to achieve representative samples at the end of fieldwork. The software looks at all surveys that currently need panel members, and calculates how many people to send invites to every 30 minutes. Due to the way individual surveys are sampled, there is no per-survey response rate; however, the overall response rate for the panel is 21 per cent, with the average response time for a clicked email being 19 hours from the point of sending.

In addition to providing an all-England sample of 1,507 respondents, the survey included three regional booster samples in each of:

- the North
- the Midlands
- London

Each of these samples is separately weighted and are representative of the adult population in each region and details of the delineation of these regions and the sample size achieved are set out in table 1.1.

**Table 1.1**  
The Future of England  
Survey regions

Region	Delineation	Sample size
The North	North West, North East and Yorkshire and the Humber government standard regions combined	750
The Midlands	West and East Midlands government standard regions combined	756
London	London government standard region	750

The rationale for this choice of regions was that the research team had strong prima facie expectations of a clear contrast between a relatively strong and coherent regional identity in the North and a weaker or more nebulous sense of regional identity in the Midlands. The rationale for including a London sample was to allow for exploration of any differences between the capital and the rest of England arising from London's status as a global city. By allowing the team to compare across the three regions, as well as comparing the three regions with the remainder of England, and indeed England as whole, the survey was designed to draw out patterns of commonality and difference in terms of both attitudes and identities.

The FoE survey consisted of 47 questions. Where possible and relevant those questions were drawn from other surveys to allow for comparison both across time and across

territories. Some of those questions featured in various iterations of the British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey.<sup>3</sup> This provides an invaluable longitudinal perspective, allowing the team to track shifts over time. But in addition, the research team drew on questions fielded in the 2009 CANS survey, allowing our English data to be read against data from 14 regions/nations in five states (see table 1.2). Particularly noteworthy in this regard is that the CANS 14 included two other capital city regions, namely Paris (Île de France) and Vienna. Analysis of the CANS data has suggested the existence of a ‘capital city effect’ to which we shall return below.

As is inevitable in a project of this nature, a number of methodological questions had to be dealt with in drawing together data from different sources. A fundamental issue is that the data that we have relied on has been collected using a variety of different survey methods. While the FoE survey was conducted through an internet panel, BSA data was collected in face-to-face interviews, and CANS data collected via telephone interviews. There are, in addition, minor differences in the question wording used in the various surveys (not least because of the different survey methods relied upon.)

We shall draw attention to differences in question wording as and when specific cases arise but, in general, our approach has been to attempt to supply as much relevant data as possible. Not least because public attitudes in England (qua England) remain under-considered and under-studied. Part of our aim in undertaking this project is to encourage further survey work and analysis, not least because it will be important to test the findings presented below against future research. In pursuing this aim, we have decided that it is better to be comprehensive. Rather than labour the point, therefore, we shall trust our readers to sound the necessary methodological cautionary notes.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1.2**  
The CANS (2009)  
regions

State	Region	Sample size
Austria	Salzburg	904
	Upper Austria	901
	Vienna	903
France	Alsace	901
	Brittany	900
	Île de France	900
Germany	Bavaria	925
	Lower Saxony	909
	Thuringia	950
Spain	Castilla la Mancha	900
	Catalonia	900
	Galicia	900
UK*	Scotland	914
	Wales	900

\* It is interesting, and perhaps salutary, to note that, despite their best efforts, financial support was not forthcoming in order to allow the research team to survey either an English region or, indeed, England as a whole. The Future of England Survey was funded from within the resources of the research team itself.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/> for more information about the British Social Attitudes Survey.

<sup>4</sup> Note for tables: Due to rounding, the percentages in some columns do not add up to 100 per cent.

## 2. DEVOLUTION: THE VIEW FROM ENGLAND

In this section we review attitudes in England towards devolved government in Scotland and Wales. As is immediately obvious from table 2.1, it is clear that there have been major changes over the past decade or so, with a sharp rise in the view that devolution has had a negative impact on how Britain is governed. Moreover, most of that change has taken place over the past four years. Whereas from 2000 to 2007 we find clear majority support for the proposition that devolution had made no difference to the government of Britain, by 2011 we find a plurality of our English respondents (with only relatively minor regional variation) reporting that devolution to both Scotland and Wales has made the way that Britain is governed worse.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2.1**  
Perceived impact of  
devolution on how Britain  
is governed, England  
2000–2011 (%)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2007	2011
<b>Impact of Scottish Parliament</b>						
Improved	18	15	19	12	12	18
Made no difference	54	62	54	64	55	20
Made worse	13	9	10	6	14	35
Don't know	12	12	14	16	15	27
<b>Impact of Welsh Assembly</b>						
Improved	15	11	n/a	8	11	17
Made no difference	57	65	n/a	66	58	24
Made worse	12	7	n/a	6	11	31
Don't know	13	14	n/a	18	16	28
N	1,928	2,761	1,924	1,917	859	1,507

Source: 2000–2007, BSA (respondents living in England only); 2011, FoE

Question: For each of the following, please state whether you think their creation has improved the way the UK is governed, made it worse, or made no difference.

To what should we attribute this rather dramatic shift in public attitudes? It seems reasonable to assume that part of the story reflects a growing perception within England that the English get a raw deal from the devolution settlement. Figure 2.1 makes clear that there is an increasingly strong tendency in England to believe that Scotland gets more than its 'fair share' of public spending. Indeed the number of people who believe this has more than doubled in the last decade.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> As we strongly suspect that attitudes to devolution to Northern Ireland are heavily coloured by attitudes to the wider peace process, we have not included data on English perceptions towards it in this table. But, for the record, 25 per cent of our 2011 respondents thought that creating the Northern Ireland Assembly had 'improved' the way the UK is governed, 22 per cent thought it had 'made it worse', 22 per cent thought it made 'no difference', while 30 per cent chose the 'don't know' category.

<sup>6</sup> That our English respondents believe that Scotland benefits disproportionately from the union is further underlined in their responses to a question that probed perceptions of the economic benefits of being part of the UK. As can be seen from the following table, when asked whether the English or Scottish economy benefits most from being part of the UK, over half (52 per cent) point to the Scottish economy. Only one in four believe that the union benefits the English and Scottish economies equally. This view is consistent across England's economically diverse regions.

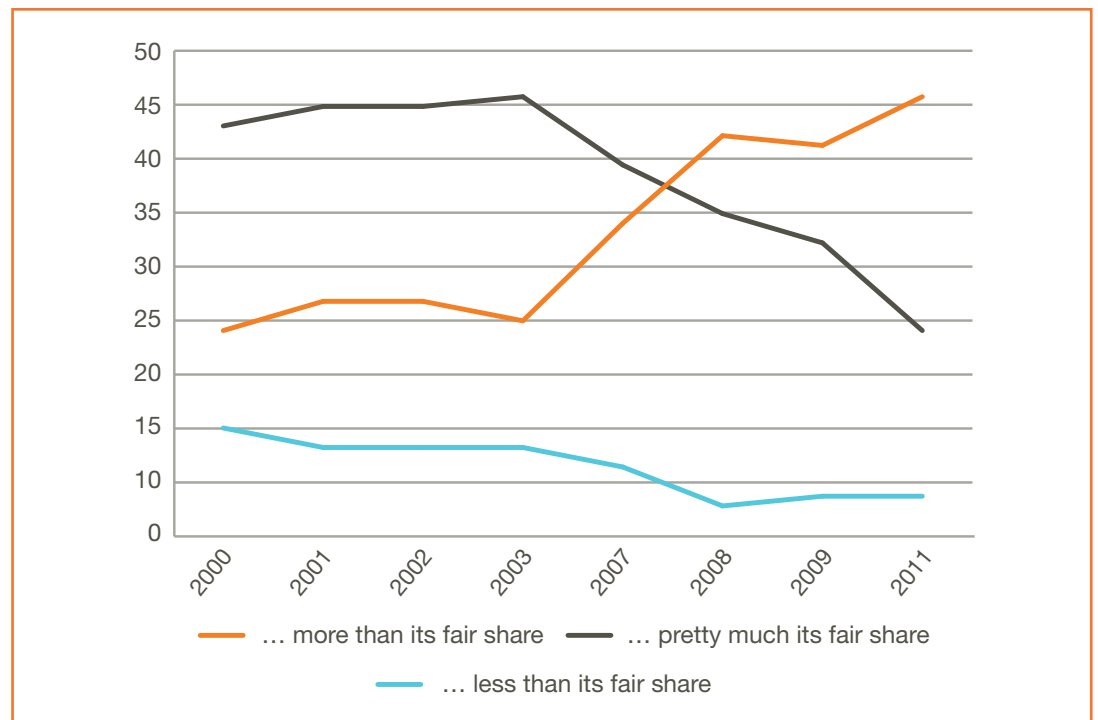
**Which economy benefits more from being part of the UK, England 2011 (%)**

	England	London	Midlands	North
England	7	11	8	7
Scotland	52	47	51	48
Both equally	19	20	18	21
Don't know	22	22	23	25

Source: FoE 2011; Question: On the whole do you think that England's economy benefits more from having Scotland in the UK, that Scotland's economy benefits more from being part of the UK, or is it about equal?

No doubt related, table 2.2 suggests that a plurality of English respondents (40 per cent) believe that England gets 'less than its fair share' of public money. However, the fact that these tables also suggest that the English do not manifest the same sense of injustice with regards to levels of public spending in Wales as compared to Scotland and yet, as we have seen, still adopt an increasingly negative view of Welsh devolution, cautions against any overly simplistic reading of cause and effect. Changing attitudes in England to the UK's devolved institutions cannot simply be explained away on the basis of resentment about relative levels of public spending.

**Figure 2.1**  
Attitudes in England  
towards Scotland's share  
of UK public spending,  
2000–2011 (%)



Source: 2000–2007, BSA (respondents living in England only); FoE 2011

Note: To facilitate comparison, in the case of the 2000–2007 data, we have combined two different response categories – 'much more than its fair share' and 'little more than its fair share' – into one 'more than its fair share' category. Similarly 'little less than its fair share' and 'much less than its fair share' have been combined to form the 'less than its fair share' category.

**Table 2.2**  
Attitudes in England  
towards Wales/Northern  
Ireland/England share  
of UK public spending,  
2011 (%)

	Wales	N. Ireland	England
... more than its fair share	26	28	7
... pretty much its fair share	28	25	26
... less than its fair share	7	5	40
Don't know	38	42	27
N	1,507	1,507	1,507

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Would you say that, compared with other parts of the UK, [...] gets pretty much its fair share of government spending, more than its fair share, or less than its fair share?

To what extent has the growing belief that devolution has had a negative impact on the government of Britain, as well as the perception that Scotland, at least, receives more than its fair share of public spending, been accompanied by a rejection of the principle of devolution tout court by English voters? Only to a much more limited extent, suggests the evidence marshalled in tables 2.3 and 2.4. While time series data shows that support for the pre-devolution status quo is at its highest level since 1997, we find four constitutional options for Scotland's future – ranging from independence to no devolution – enjoying very similar levels of support across the English electorate (table 2.3). We detect no groundswell of support within England for Scottish independence. Current attitudes in England towards the constitutional status of both Wales and Northern Ireland are similarly divided (table 2.4).

**Table 2.3**

Attitudes in England to how Scotland should be governed, 1997–2011 (%)

	1997	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2007	2011
... become independent, separate from UK and EU, or separate from the UK but part of the EU	14	21	19	19	19	17	19	22
... remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has some taxation powers	38	44	44	53	41	50	36	22
... remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament, which has no taxation powers	17	13	8	7	11	8	12	19
... remain part of the UK, without an elected parliament	23	14	17	11	15	13	18	22
Don't know	8	8	11	10	14	11	15	15
N	2,536	902	1,928	2,761	1,924	1,917	859	1,507

Sources: 1997, British Election Study (English respondents only); 1999–2007, BSA (English respondents only); 2011, FoE Question: Which of these statements come closest to your view? Scotland should ...

**Table 2.4**

Attitudes in England to how Wales/Northern Ireland should be governed, 2011 (%)

Wales	
... become independent, separate from UK and EU, or separate from the UK but part of the EU	17
... remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has some taxation powers	22
... remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament, which has no taxation powers	22
... remain part of the UK, without an elected parliament	24
Don't know	16
Northern Ireland	
...become independent separate from the UK	23
...become part of the Republic of Ireland with its own elected assembly	14
...become part of the Republic of Ireland without an elected assembly	5
...remain part of the UK with its own elected assembly	26
...remain part of the UK without an elected assembly	12
Don't know	20
N	1,507

Source: FoE 2011

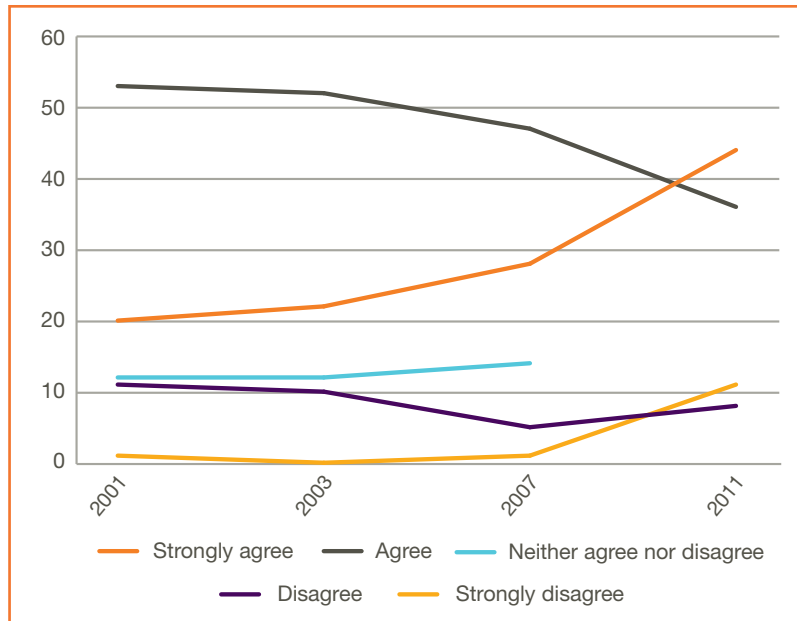
Question: Which of these statements come closest to your view? Wales/Northern Ireland should ...

English support for reform is, however, far less equivocal when it comes to amendments that directly address grievances they have with current devolution settlement. As is clear from figure 2.2, so-called fiscal autonomy is supported by a stunning 80 per cent of English voters, with fully 44 per cent agreeing strongly and 36 per cent agreeing with the proposition that services in Scotland should be paid for by taxes collected in that country.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile 'English votes on English laws' (figure 2.3) – the proposal that parliamentary procedures at Westminster should be adjusted to ensure that only English MPs are allowed to vote on those matters that only affect England – is supported by 79 per cent of the English electorate. Indeed an absolute majority (53 per cent) of English voters 'strongly agree' with the proposition that 'Scottish MPs should not be allowed to vote on English matters'.

<sup>7</sup> The question was not asked of either Wales or Northern Ireland.

The substantial rise since 2007 in the number of those who ‘strongly agree’ to fiscal autonomy (up 16 percentage points) and blocking non-English MPs voting on English matters (up 28 percentage points) underlines the intensity of feeling now associated with these reforms. In a context in which the Scottish government is calling for fiscal autonomy to be offered as an option for Scottish voters in that country’s forthcoming referendum (through a proposal known as ‘devolution-max’), and in which the UK government has set up a commission on the West Lothian question, it would appear that the English electorate (at least) has already made up its mind.

**Figure 2.2**  
Attitudes in England  
towards Scottish  
‘fiscal autonomy’,  
2000–2011 (%)



Sources: 2001–2007, BSA (English respondents only); FoE 2011

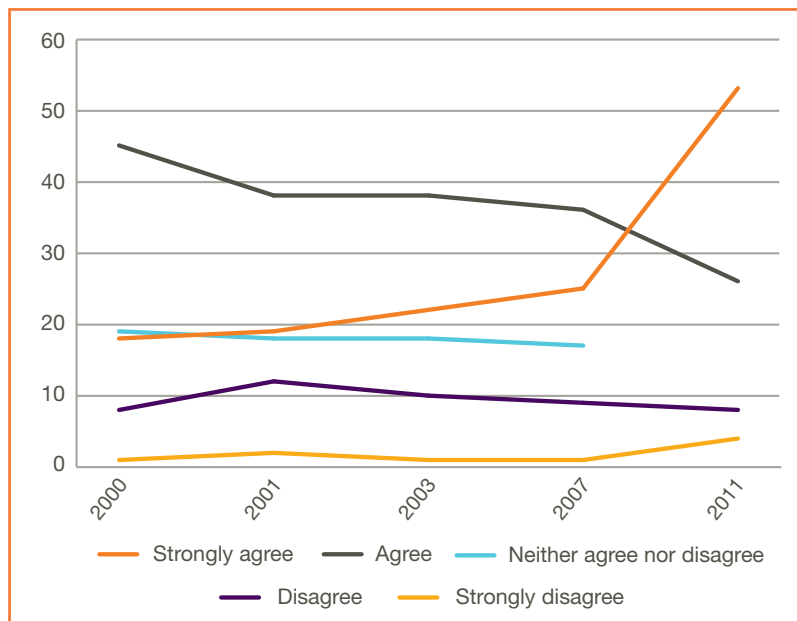
Question: Now that Scotland has its own parliament, it should pay for its services out of taxes collected in Scotland.

Notes:

‘Strongly disagree’ not offered in 2003; ‘Neither agree nor disagree’ not offered in 2011.

Excludes ‘Don’t know’ responses.

**Figure 2.3**  
Attitudes in England  
towards ‘English votes  
on English laws’,  
2000–2011 (%)



Sources: 2000–2007, British Social Attitudes (English respondents only); FoE 2011

Question: Now that Scotland has its own parliament, Scottish MPs should not be allowed to vote in the House of Commons on laws that affect only England.

Notes:

‘Neither agree nor disagree’ not offered in 2011.

Excludes ‘Don’t know’ responses.

### 3. ENGLAND EMERGES

Thus far we have focused on attitudes in England towards how other parts of the UK should be governed. But what of England itself? To what extent are English voters still content with the institutional status quo in which England is governed by the UK government and UK parliament at Westminster? And if no longer content, what institutional architecture would they prefer to see taking its place?

The first thing to note is that there appears to be a very widespread sense that the institutions of government tend to favour the interests of one part of England more than the others. But beyond that, there is also compelling evidence to suggest that a substantial proportion of English voters are now dubious of the ability of UK institutions to work in the interests of England as a whole.

That an overwhelming majority of the English electorate believe that the UK government ‘looks after some parts of England more than others’ (table 3.1) is hardly unexpected. Nor is the very widespread perception that it is the south east in general, and London in particular, that are the main beneficiaries in any way surprising (table 3.2). Indeed, perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the ubiquity of this belief is that it is shared by a very clear majority of Londoners themselves. In the Midlands and the North this is a high-on universally shared view, expressed by 87 per cent and 89 per cent of our respondents respectively.

**Table 3.1**

UK government looks after the interests of all parts of England equally/ not equally, 2011 (%)

	England	London	Midlands	North
More or less equally	17	26	16	10
Looks after some parts more than others	72	58	74	77
Don't know	11	16	9	13
<i>N</i>	1,507	750	756	750

Source: FoE

**Table 3.2**

Which parts of England are looked after best, 2011 (%)

	England	London	Midlands	North
North East	9	12	4	1
North West	8	11	4	1
Yorkshire and Humber	6	9	2	2
East Midlands	4	8	2	3
West Midlands	6	9	3	4
East of England	8	7	7	7
<b>London</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>South East</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>76</b>
South West	26	14	26	41
None of these	0	1	0	0
Don't know	6	13	5	4
<i>N</i>	1,507	750	756	750

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Which part of England is looked after best? (Tick all that apply)



Given the particular focus of this paper, of more interest is the relative lack of trust in the UK government's willingness to 'work in the best long-term interests of England' (table 3.3). In this case regional differences are modest. In each case a clear majority of respondents state that they have either not very much or no trust at all in the UK government to work in the best interests of England.

**Table 3.3**  
Trust in the UK government to work in the best long-term interests of England, 2011 (%)

	England	London	Midlands	North
A great deal	4	7	4	3
A fair amount	31	32	32	25
Not very much	42	39	41	41
Not at all	17	13	18	24
Don't know	6	9	6	7
N	1,507	750	756	750

Source: FoE 2011

Question: How much do you trust the UK government at Westminster to work in the best long-term interests of England?

Given the general lack of trust in politicians, it might well be objected that the sentiments captured in table 3.3 are a manifestation of a general discontentment with politics per se, rather than a more specific, let alone coherent, concern with the ability of UK institutions to govern effectively in the interests of England. This objection loses much of its plausibility once we compare attitudes towards the status quo as against other constitutional options that have been advanced to improve English governance.

**Table 3.4**  
Constitutional preferences for England, 2011 (%)

	Eng.	London	Mids	North
England to be governed as it is now with laws made by all MPs in the UK parliament	24	29	25	21
England to be governed with laws made by English MPs in the UK parliament	34	33	33	32
England as a whole to have its own new English parliament with law-making powers	20	13	22	20
Each region of England to have its own assembly	9	9	7	10
Don't know	14	16	12	17
N	1,507	750	756	750

Source: FoE 2011

**Table 3.5**  
Constitutional preferences for England, 1999–2009 (%)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
England governed as it is now, with laws made by the UK parliament	62	54	57	56	50	53	54	54	57	51	49
England as whole to have its own new parliament with law-making powers	18	19	16	17	18	21	18	21	17	26	29
Each region of England to have its own assembly that runs services like health*	15	18	23	20	26	21	20	18	14	15	15
N	2,718	1,928	2,761	2,897	3,709	2,684	1,794	928	859	982	980

Source: BSA (respondents living in England only)

Question: With all the changes going on in the way different parts of Great Britain are run, which of the following do you think would be best for England?

\* In 2004–2006, this answer option read 'that makes decisions about the region's economy, planning and housing'. The 2003 survey carried both versions of this option and demonstrated that the difference of wording did not make a material difference to the pattern of response. The figures quoted for 2003 are those for the two versions combined.

Excludes 'Don't know' responses.

Table 3.4 reports responses to four constitutional options for the future governance of England including the status quo (capturing also the relatively minor regional variations in attitudes.) The first thing to note is the status quo now enjoys the support of barely one in four respondents. This, we believe, represents a significant shift in public opinion. Our desire to probe responses to the full range of options that feature in current debates means that this question is not strictly comparable with previous BSA questions. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that all past BSA surveys bar one have found majority support in England for the status quo, with the only exception showing very strong plurality support (table 3.5). Second, even if proponents of regional government in England have often sought to frame such a development as a means of countering the dominance of the south east, this is an option that enjoys only very limited public support (including in the north of England). In 2011 this amounted to only 9 per cent of respondents (table 3.4). It is clear, therefore, that support for the status quo is now very much reduced and that regionalism is not an alternative that enjoys popular support. What is more open to question is how best to interpret the rest of the findings.

At first blush, the plurality support enjoyed by ‘English votes on English laws’ in the FoE survey 2011 (table 3.4) would suggest that this option is now in pole position as the alternative to the status quo. This reading is further buttressed when we recall not only the attitudes towards Scottish MPs, in particular, as set out in table 2.3 above, but also the fact that ‘English votes on English laws’ is the only one of the alternatives actively championed by a mainstream political party. Indeed the Conservatives have now fought every general election campaign since the establishment of the devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales on the basis of a manifesto pledge to introduce some version of ‘English votes on English laws’ at Westminster. Nonetheless, we would suggest that the truly significant aspect of these findings is rather that, in combination, support for either ‘English votes on English laws’ or a freestanding English parliament – that is, support for reforms that are conspicuously ‘English’ in their territorial scope – amounts to a clear majority (54 per cent) of the English electorate.

Why do we choose to attribute greater significance to the emergence of majority support for some form of ‘English option’ for the future governance of England, rather than to the existence of plurality support for ‘English votes on English laws’? Because other data from the survey suggests that, while support for the status quo is relatively weak and that England is indeed emerging as a serious option at the level of popular opinion at least, opinion in England has yet to coalesce decisively around any particular institutional arrangement.

This is evidenced when we turn to questions designed to probe respondents’ perceptions of which level of government has *most* influence over the way England is run and their preferences for which level *ought* to have most influence. This is a question that has been used to great effect in Wales and Scotland as well as part of the CANS survey, almost invariably underlining popular support for an enhanced role for the ‘regional’ level. At first glance, table 3.6 does little more than confirm the deep euroscepticism of the English electorate with more than one in four of the view that it is the European Union that currently has the most influence over the way England is run. This is very much higher than the equivalent figure for either Wales or Scotland. Indeed CANS data underlines the remarkable extent to which perceptions of the level of influence wielded by the EU differs in England as compared to other nations’ regions across Europe (table 3.7). Beyond this the responses seem to provide an endorsement for the status quo, with 70 per cent of respondents supporting the view that the UK government should have the most influence over the way England is governed. But the list of options presented in table 3.6 simply reflects the political institutions currently in existence for England. It does not include any distinctly English institutional arrangements. How does the picture change if we offer possible alternative options?

**Table 3.6**  
Which layer of government has, and should have, the most influence over the way England is run, 2011? (%)

	Has most influence	Should have most influence
Local councils	4	19
UK government	60	70
EU	27	1
Other	2	3
Don't know	7	6
<i>N</i>	1,507	1,507

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Which of the following do you think currently has the most influence over the way England is governed? Which of the following do you think should have the most influence over the way England is run?

**Table 3.7**  
A euroscepticism barometer: comparative attitudes towards the influence of the EU

'Region'	Percentage who think the EU has most influence
<b>England</b>	<b>27</b>
Brittany	9
Upper Austria	9
Galicia	9
Alsace	8
Scotland	8
Castilla La Mancha	8
Vienna	7
Salzburg	7
Wales	7
Catalonia	6
Bavaria	6
Lower Saxony	5
Île de France	5
Thuringia	4

Source: CANS 2009, except England FoE 2011

Table 3.8 reports responses to a number of potential constitutional arrangements for the government of England. The first point to note is that once other possibilities are included, support for the status quo declines precipitously: from the 70 per cent reported in table 3.6 to just one in four electors. It is rather the only all-England option on offer to respondents in this particular question, namely an English parliament, that enjoys plurality support.

**Table 3.8**  
Which institution(s) *should* have most influence over the way England is run, 2011? (%)

Constitutional options for England	
Stronger local councils	17
Elected regional assemblies throughout England	12
An English parliament	36
UK government	24
EU	0
Other	1
Don't know	10
<i>N</i>	1,507

Source: FoE 2011

Question: And what if, in the future, there were different types of institutions in England: Which of the following do you think should have the most influence over the way England is run?

A final observation may be entered here in parenthesis with regards ‘localism’ – namely the suggestion that the most appropriate way in which to govern England is through some combination of the UK government and parliament and a reinvigorated tier of English local government. To the extent to which localism is championed as a response to the asymmetries of devolution, and specifically the West Lothian question, it is, of course, a non sequitur, relating as it does to the internal government of England rather than the relationship between the government of the four territories that form the UK. That said, while there may well be very good reasons for addressing excessive centralism within England, public support for a radical form of localism – whereby local councils would have the ‘most influence’ over government within England – is limited (at 17 per cent). Moreover the evidence presented in this section suggests that addressing the inadequacies of the current balance of power between central and local government should not be regarded as a substitute for taking the government of England qua England far more seriously than has hitherto been the case. At best, localism could represent only a partial answer to the English question.

While alternative readings of these findings are, of course, possible, we would argue that our survey findings strongly suggest that support in England for the status quo (in terms of arrangements for territorial government) is now relatively weak. Our confidence in this interpretation is further strengthened by the data and analysis set out in our previous section on **Devolution: The view from England** which suggests growing concern in England about the fairness of devolution. As for alternatives: our findings point to the emergence of an English dimension to the politics of England, at least at the popular level. That support for particular institutional options appears to be dependent, at least in part, on question wording suggests that the English are divided over the precise form that any ‘English option’ should take. It may also indicate that it is an issue that remains of relatively low salience. Nonetheless, the (re)emergence of England as a political unit in the eyes of the English electorate is clearly a development of signal importance.

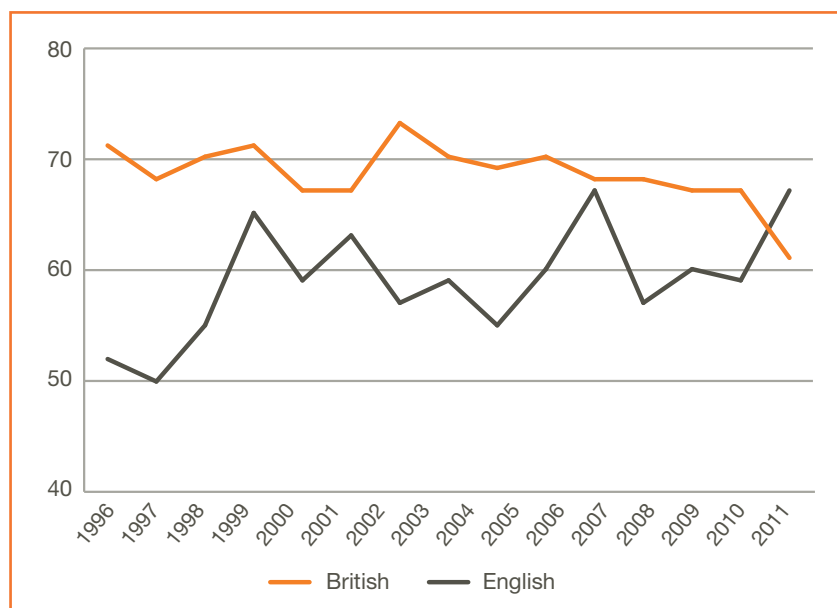
## 4. ENGLAND AS A NASCENT POLITICAL COMMUNITY

If an English dimension to British politics is (re)emerging, not simply as an unintended consequence of devolution to the ‘Celtic fringe’, but rather as an outcome desired by a significant section of the country’s population, this raises fundamental questions about the coherence of England as a nascent political community. To what extent might any putative political institutionalisation of ‘England’ be underpinned by a shared sense of Englishness; shared not only territorially but also socially? How does a sense of Englishness relate to Britishness? Is England becoming more like Wales and Scotland in the sense that, as is obviously the case for both Welsh and Scottish national identity, English national identity is now regarded as distinct from (if still compatible with) British identity, rather than somehow identical or otherwise subsumed within it?

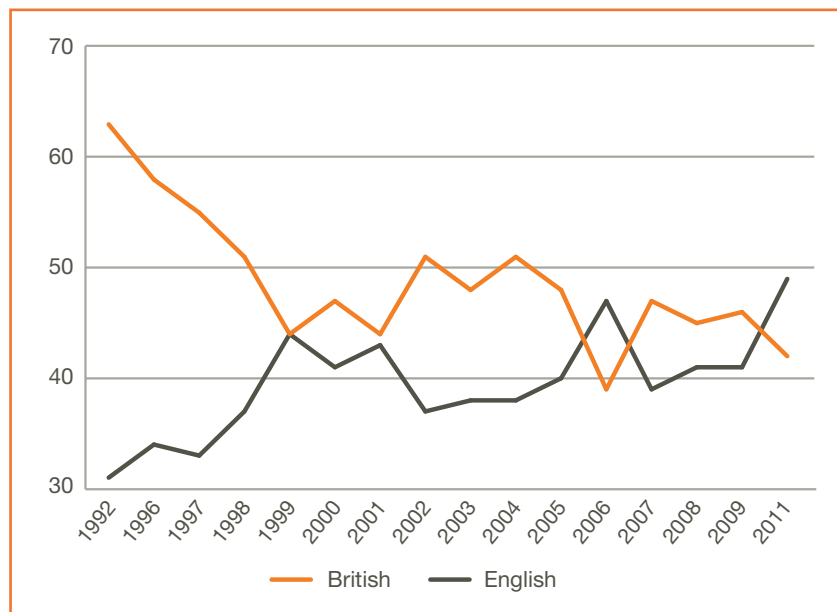
Individual and collective senses of identity and affiliation are not easy to measure. Identities tend to be multi-faceted and are often ‘subconscious’ or at least unreflected. Nonetheless social scientists have developed a range of techniques to explore national identity. Here we shall report on two possible approaches that we have adopted in the context of England. Happily, as will become clear, both serve to confirm the same general picture.

One of the simplest – and arguably most simplistic – ways of probing any given individual’s sense of national identity is via the so-called ‘forced identity’ question. This is a two-stage question (figures 4.1 and 4.2). First, respondents are asked to choose which identities (from a range of options) apply to themselves. At this point they are free to choose as many or as few options as they think appropriate. Subsequently, however, respondents are required to choose which ‘best describes the way you think of yourself’. When we asked this question to a representative sample of the English electorate, at the first, multiple option stage (figure 4.1) we found both British (61 per cent) and, even more so, English (67 per cent) identity featuring strongly. When, in the second stage (figure 4.2) they are forced to choose one option, again more choose English (49 per cent) than British (42 per cent).

**Figure 4.1**  
‘Forced choice’ national  
identity (stage one),  
England 1996–2011 (%)



**Figure 4.2**  
'Forced choice' national identity (stage two), England 1992–2011 (%)



Sources: 1992 and 1997, British Election Study; 1996–2009 (except 1997), BSA; FoE 2011<sup>8</sup>

Question: Which, if any, of the words below best describe the way you think of yourself? Please tick as many or as few as apply (stage one). And if you had to choose, which one best describes the way you think of yourself? (stage two)

The real interest of these findings comes when we locate them in a longer time series. Turning to the first stage (where respondents may choose a number of different options), while it would be unwise to make too much of one set of results, it is nonetheless striking that 2011 is the first time that more respondents have identified themselves as English rather than British.

Our interpretation of responses to the second, 'forced' stage can be more definitive: here we witness a clear trend over time with Britishness in relative decline against an increasing tendency to choose English identity as the one which 'best describes' respondents. The changes involved are marked: in slightly less than two decades the proportion of respondents identifying as British has declined by a third. Meanwhile the proportion that chooses English identity has grown from less than a third to only slightly less than half of the sample.

Critics of the forced-identity question argue that it is insufficiently nuanced, and in particular, by forcing respondents to choose only one identity, it ignores the fact that in so-called plurinational contexts like the UK, many individuals have overlapping – or nested – senses of identity. In other words, in the real world, individuals can – and do – feel both English and British without any sense of contradiction, let alone existential angst. In this type of context, social scientists interested in issues surrounding national identity often deploy a question – now known almost universally as the 'Moreno question' after the Spanish political scientist, Luis Moreno – designed to explore overlapping or nested identities. This asks respondents to place themselves on a spectrum that includes both singular and nested senses of identity. In the English case, this spectrum extends from an exclusively English to an exclusively British identity, with intervening levels of overlap (see table 4.1 for the full range of options).

Table 4.1 provides a snapshot of patterns of national identity in England in 2011. There are a number of ways of interpreting the results. Clearly it is possible to emphasise the strength of dual identity, with a majority (66 per cent) viewing themselves as having some combination of English and British identity. Indeed a plurality of respondents said they are 'equally England and British.' For our purposes, however, the most significant and revealing analysis stems from contrasting the groups that say they are either exclusively English, or more English than British, with those that say they are exclusively British, or more British than English. Why so? Because this allows us to interrogate the relative weight people in England attach to both their English and British identity. The results

<sup>8</sup> It is also perhaps worth noting that the 2006 data was collected around the time of the football World Cup.

are striking. Those that prioritise their English over their British identity (40 per cent), outnumber those that prioritise their British over their English identity (16 per cent) by more than two-to-one.

**Table 4.1**  
England 'Moreno'  
identities, 2011 (%)

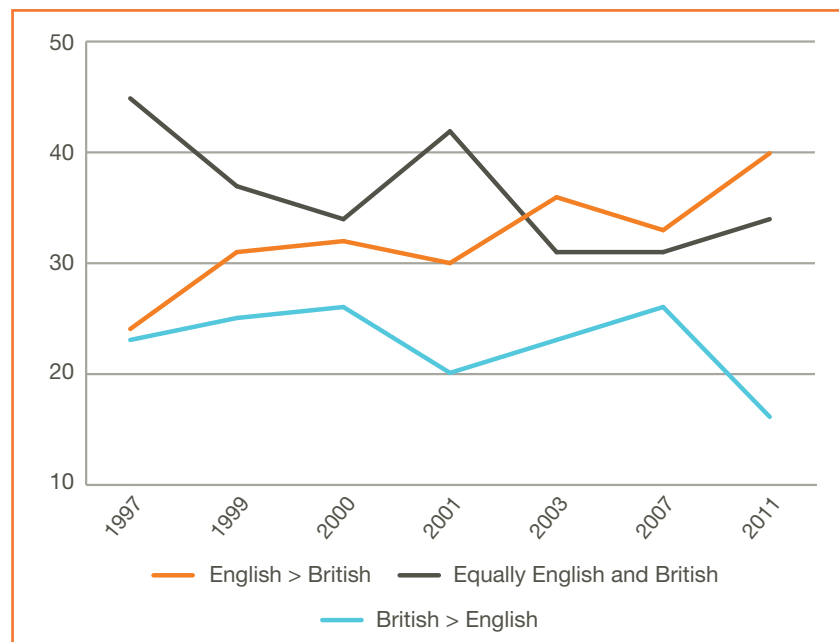
	England	London	Midlands	North
English not British	17	13	17	17
More English than British	23	19	24	20
Equally English and British	34	25	36	39
More British than English	9	12	9	8
British not English	7	14	6	6
Other	6	10	4	5
Don't know	3	7	3	4
N	1,507	750	756	750

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Which, if any, of the following best describes the way you think of yourself?

Viewed as part of a time series (figure 4.3), the 2011 data proves to be the most 'English' set of responses yet encountered. More generally, even if dual identity remains the majority position – a point that certainly should not be overlooked – the data nonetheless serves to confirm the findings from the 'forced choice' identity question that suggested a strengthening of English and a concomitant waning of British identity. We do not believe that these two sets of data suggest that British identity is necessarily in terminal decline or that we are witnessing a straightforward rejection of Britishness by the English. Instead, we believe this evidence points to the emergence in recent decades of a different kind of Anglo-British identity in which the 'Anglo' component is increasingly considered the primary source of attachment for the English.

**Figure 4.3**  
Trends in 'Moreno'  
national identity, England  
1997–2011 (%)



Source: 1997: British Election Study; 1999–2007 British Social Attitudes; YouGov 2011

Notes: This table combines those that say they are 'English not British' with the 'More English than British' group, and those that say they are 'British not English' with the 'More British than English' respondents. Excludes 'Don't know' responses.

But is this shift in national affiliation shared uniformly across England's regions? As is clear from table 4.1, the situation in London is somewhat different from the position in the North and the Midlands or, indeed, England as a whole. Specifically, patterns of national identity in London tend more towards the British end of the English-British spectrum than is the case elsewhere. Differences here should not be exaggerated, however. Even in London, the

overall balance tilts towards the English side of the spectrum. Nonetheless, the differences between London and the English average are interesting and require further explanation.

One possibility is the existence of a ‘capital city’ effect. With London home to almost every significant British institution, might the capital’s population be more inclined to associate themselves with Britishness than is the case elsewhere? Another possible explanation is the presence in London of a relatively large proportion of immigrants. Fully 20 per cent of our London sample was born outside the UK as compared to 5 per cent and 3 per cent for the Midlands and the North respectively. Might these immigrants have found it easier to adopt – or adapt to – a British rather than English identity? We shall return to that question below.

In addition to probing individual respondents’ own sense of national identity, we also asked respondents whether or not they assented with the proposition that ‘people in England have become more aware of their English national identity’. As is clear from table 4.2, fully 60 per cent either agreed or agreed strongly. Regional differences in responses were minimal, further suggesting that this is indeed a very widely held belief.

**Table 4.2**  
People in England have become more aware of English national identity, 2011 (%)

	England	London	Midlands	North
Agree strongly	19	17	21	19
Agree	41	42	43	41
Disagree	20	19	18	18
Disagree strongly	4	4	3	4
Don’t know	17	19	15	19
<i>N</i>	1,507	750	756	750

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Recently, people in England have become more aware of English national identity.

When located in a comparative context through the data available from the 2009 CANS, what is striking is the relative strength of the English component of national identities in England as part of the broader structure of dual identities. Indeed, as table 4.3 makes clear, only in Scotland and Catalonia are sub-state national identities stronger than in England.<sup>9</sup> This must be considered a truly remarkable finding, especially when it is recalled that, with the significant exception of sport, and in stark contrast to the Scottish and Catalan cases, England does not have the same tradition of official institutionalisation and celebration of English (as opposed to British) identity. Quite the opposite, in fact: the strengthening of English identity appears to be a phenomenon that is being driven by the English themselves, despite the entreaties of an official level that seems to focus almost exclusively on the benefits of Britishness.

The evidence marshalled thus far strongly suggests that English identity is in the ascendant even if dual or nested English and British identity remains the norm. This impression is further underlined when we review responses to other questions that facilitate an exploration of the relationship between senses of Britishness and Englishness.

Asked how proud they feel to be English and British (table 4.4) we find very high levels of pride in both national identities. Fully 79 and 77 per cent, respectively, of respondents in England report that they are very proud or fairly proud to be English and British. There is, nonetheless, greater emphasis on the English dimension with a 10 point gap between those who say they are very proud to be English and those who are very proud to be British. There are some interesting regional variations in responses here, with Londoners (at 39 per cent) least likely to say that they are ‘very proud’ to be English. However, even in the capital the proportion of respondents who report being very proud to be English is higher than the proportion who are very proud to be British.

9 By choosing to differentiate between the ‘state’ and the ‘regional’ levels, we realise that we will likely offend both state nationalists, who prefer to differentiate between the ‘national’ and ‘sub-national’ levels, and sub-state nationalists, who chafe against the use of ‘region’ in the context of territorial entities that regard themselves as ‘nations’. We simply ask for forbearance on the basis that it is, in our experience, impossible to find a terminology that is both universally understandable and politically neutral.



**Table 4.3**  
Comparative trends in  
'Moreno' national  
identity (%)

	'Region' only	'Region' > State	Equal	State > 'Region'	State only
Scotland	19	41	26	4	7
Catalonia	16	29	37	6	6
<b>England</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>
Wales	11	29	33	10	15
Upper Austria	10	16	38	11	22
Bavaria	9	19	36	11	19
Thuringia	9	18	44	9	17
Salzburg	9	17	50	9	10
Vienna	7	14	38	15	19
Galicia	6	25	57	6	4
Lower Saxony	6	11	34	15	27
Brittany	2	23	50	15	9
Castilla la Mancha	2	4	52	18	20
Alsace	1	17	42	20	15
Île de France	1	7	30	42	12

Source: CANS 2009, except England FoE 2011

**Table 4.4**  
National pride, 2011 (%)

	England	London	Midlands	North
<b>English</b>				
Very proud	48	39	52	47
Fairly proud	31	29	30	31
Not very proud	9	9	8	12
Not at all proud	4	3	4	3
<b>British</b>				
Very proud	38	36	39	39
Fairly proud	39	38	41	38
Not very proud	13	10	12	15
Not at all proud	5	4	4	4
<i>N</i>	1,432	662	730	721

Source: FoE 2011

Question: How proud, if at all, are you to be English/British?

Note: excludes 'Not applicable' and 'Don't know'.

A very similar picture emerges when we probe respondents' sense of attachment to various territorial scales. With regards to relative levels of attachment to England and the UK as a whole (table 4.5), we find that there is indeed a greater sense of attachment to England (85 per cent) than the UK (76 per cent), although this is in context of high levels of attachment to both. The difference between them is most marked in relation to the proportions declaring themselves to be very attached to England (44 per cent) as opposed to those very attached to Britain (31 per cent). There are no significant regional differences to this pattern.

**Table 4.5**  
Degree of attachment in  
England to England/UK,  
2011 (%)

	England	London	Midlands	North
<b>England</b>				
Very attached	44	44	45	44
Fairly attached	41	41	40	38
Not very attached	11	10	11	14
Not at all attached	3	3	4	3
Don't know	1	2	1	2
<b>UK</b>				
Very attached	31	33	31	30
Fairly attached	45	43	45	46
Not very attached	17	17	17	17
Not at all attached	6	5	6	5
Don't know	1	2	1	2
<i>N</i>	1,507	750	756	750

Source: FoE 2011

Question: How attached, if at all, do you feel to the following places?

Once again the CANS data allows us to compare the sense of attachment in England with that observable in other European nations and regions. In table 4.6 we compare the proportion that report themselves to be very attached to the sub-state nation/region with those reporting themselves very attached to the state. To take the two poles from the CANS data, fully 80 per cent of the Scottish sample were very attached to Scotland as compared to the 43 per cent who were very attached to the UK. In Île de France, by contrast, only 26 per cent were very attached to 'regional' level as compared to the 53 per cent who reported themselves to be very attached to France.

When England is incorporated in the table we note that it is among those 'regions' in which attachment to region is greater than attachment to state. Perhaps even more interesting is that English attachment to both nation and state appears relatively weaker than that in most other territories. Indeed, it is striking that the proportion of English respondents who are very attached to the UK is substantially lower than the proportion of either Welsh or Scottish respondents who reported themselves to be very attached to the same UK state.

**Table 4.6**  
Very attached 'region' and  
state, comparative (%)

	A: 'Region' (%)	B: State (%)	A – B
Scotland	80	43	37
Catalonia	55	25	30
Wales	69	49	20
Brittany	65	49	16
Thuringia	57	42	15
Galicia	58	44	14
<b>England</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>13</b>
Bavaria	53	42	11
Alsace	60	60	0
Vienna	52	61	-9
Salzburg	52	64	-12
Upper Austria	51	62	-11
Lower Saxony	36	51	-15
Castilla la Mancha	33	52	-19
Île de France	26	53	-27

Source: CANS 2009; FoE 2011

One indication of the pride in and attachment to England across the English electorate is the very strong support shown in the FoE survey to the suggestion that St George's Day should be celebrated as a bank holiday. As is clear from table 4.7, fully 74 per cent of our respondents agreed with this proposition, with 47 per cent 'agreeing strongly'. While one response might be to dismiss such a finding on the basis that we should not be surprised that three-quarters of the electorate approve of the idea of an addition to their annual holiday allowance, we would caution against such a cynical or dismissive interpretation. We would rather view this finding as further confirmation of the broader pattern of responses that we have been highlighting in this discussion. Certainly scholars have long recognised the central role played by the symbolic and the ceremonial in (every) national identity. We should not be surprised, therefore, that an increased awareness of and pride in Englishness is being accompanied by such overwhelming levels of support for the public celebration of English national identity.

**Table 4.7**  
Should St George's Day  
be a public holiday?  
2011 (%)

Agree strongly	47
Tend to agree	27
Tend to disagree	8
Disagree strongly	4
Don't know	13
<i>N</i>	1,507

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Should St George's Day be a public holiday?

Thus far in this section we have explored evidence that suggests that, while dual or nested, English and British national identities remain the majority position among the English electorate, it is nonetheless English identity that is in the ascendancy. It is English identity that is most strongly felt and that generates most pride; and it is England rather than the UK as a whole that generates the strongest sense of attachment. Moreover, with the caveat that, on some measures, Britishness retains a somewhat stronger grip in London, it appears that the pattern is broadly similar across England as a whole. But to what extent is English identity shared across various social cleavages within English society?

To answer that question, table 4.8 sets out the relationship between a range of social and economic variables and national identity as measured by the 'Moreno' question (see table 4.1 and figure 4.3).

As is immediately apparent, with one important exception (discussed below), English identity appears to be stronger than British identity – or the English component of dual English-British identity stronger than the British component – across all social and demographic groups. True, there are some noticeable differences. So, for instance, members of social class C2 appear to attach more importance to their English identity than those in the top or bottom social strata. Conservative voters place greater emphasis on their English identity than do Labour voters, with Liberal Democrat identifiers noticeably less likely to emphasise their English identity than supporters of either of the other main parties. But however fascinating these differences, what is surely more significant is the sheer consistency of the overall picture. English identity is stronger than British identity across almost all major social groups surveyed.<sup>10</sup>

The major exception is provided by ethnic minority respondents. Put simply, this group was far less likely to view themselves as English than the rest of the sample. Indeed while 43 per cent of 'White British' respondents chose either the 'English not British' or 'More English than British' options, this is true for only 27 per cent of their ethnic minority counterparts. Conversely, 37 per cent of ethnic minority respondents chose to prioritise their British over their English identity, while only 14 per cent of 'White British' respondents did so.

10 See *More than One English Question* by Michael Kenny and Guy Lodge (IPPR 2009) for a fuller discussion about the factors shaping English identity: <http://www.ippr.org/publications/55/1695/more-than-one-english-question>

**Table 4.8**  
National identity  
(Moreno) by social  
group, 2011 (%)

	English > British	Equal	British > English	E>B +/- B>E	N
<b>All</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>+24</b>	<b>1,507</b>
White British	43	36	14	+29	1,380
Non-white British	19	23	37	-18	98
18–24	38	33	16	+22	182
25–39	37	38	21	+16	386
40–59	45	27	18	+27	487
60+	41	47	7	+34	427
Male	42	32	17	+25	735
Female	39	36	15	+24	772
AB	36	36	19	+17	422
C1	43	35	15	+28	452
C2	46	33	14	+32	316
DE	33	32	19	+14	316
Labour	38	41	15	+23	479
Conservative	49	34	13	+36	460
Lib Dem	29	34	29	0	185

Source: FoE 2011

Note: excludes 'Don't know' responses.

Given that the numbers of ethnic minority respondents involved in our survey and answering these particular questions are small, it must be immediately acknowledged that some caution should be exercised in the interpretation of our results. A larger, more representative sample of ethnic minority respondents might produce a different result, and might also throw up significant differences between ethnic groups that we are unable to capture here.

Moreover, even if the inference is correct that members of ethnic minorities living in England find Englishness a less amenable identity than Britishness, we would simply point out that there is nothing inevitable about this state of affairs. There is strong evidence from Scotland, for example, that the sub-state identity can prove more inclusive of ethnic minority immigrants and their descendents than the state-wide equivalent; the same is almost certainly true in Wales. One obvious difference between the Scottish and Welsh case and the experience in England is that the political class in England, with some minor exceptions, have made little effort to promote Englishness as an inclusive and tolerant identity. Instead, they continue to focus their energies espousing the merits of Britishness, ignoring the fact that it is English identity that has become emboldened in recent years. Even without such intervention, there are tentative signs that ethnic minorities are becoming less reluctant to embrace Englishness than in the past. For instance, as table 4.9 demonstrates, when the BSA asked the 'Moreno' question in 2007, the number of 'non-whites' choosing to prioritise their English over their British identity was just 4 per cent, compared with the 22 per cent recorded in 2011 by the FoE survey. Nonetheless, it appears that a significant ethnicity gap remains which in turn raises important questions in a context in which a more explicit English dimension is emerging in the country's politics.

**Table 4.9**  
National identity  
(Moreno) by non-white  
British, 2007–2011 (%)

	2007	2011
English not British	1	9
More English than British	3	13
Equally English and British	18	23
More British than English	16	11
British not English	38	26
Other/None/Don't Know	24	20
N	84	98

Source: BSA 2007; FoE 2011

## 5. THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF ENGLISH IDENTITY

In this paper we have marshalled evidence that demonstrates that a number of potentially significant changes are underway in attitudes in England towards the government of the UK. English voters are now more sceptical of devolution than they have been in the past. In particular, there is a belief that the devolved polities benefit disproportionately from public spending and a related, very strong desire was evidenced for fiscal autonomy for Scotland. But the shift in attitudes is even more fundamental than that. Only one in four of the English electorate now supports the status quo in terms of the way England is governed. There is rather strong evidence of a desire for what we have termed an English dimension to the country's politics; a desire that England be governed by specifically English arrangements, be that 'English votes on English laws' – that is, the modification of procedures in Westminster so that only English MPs are allowed to vote on legislation that affects England – or a full-blown English parliament.

In addition to changing attitudes to constitutional arrangements, we have also shown evidence of substantial changes in patterns of national identity in England. In simple, perhaps simplistic terms, England is becoming more English. While dual identity – some combination of overlapping English and British identities – remains the norm, the English element is strengthening. With one potentially significant exception, this appears to be the case across the territory and across all social groups. All of which suggests that arguments to the effect that England is particularly divided or (without the skein of the UK) prone to centrifugal forces, are overplayed. England (qua England) appears as a relatively coherent political community.

Thus far, however, we have not probed the relationship between national identity and demands for constitutional and political change, either of the UK or, more particularly, England itself. We shall proceed to do so in this section. Throughout, we will employ both measures of national identity already utilised in this paper, namely responses to the 'forced choice' and the 'Moreno' questions.

As will become abundantly clear, a focus on the relationship between identity and political/constitutional preferences reveals pronounced differences between the growing number of those in England who stress their Englishness, on the one hand, and the declining number of those who emphasise their Britishness, on the other. Those with an exclusive or stronger sense of their English identity tend, on average, to be more negative about devolution and more likely to believe that Scotland, in particular, benefits disproportionately from the union. They are also substantially more likely to support the development of an 'English dimension' to the country's politics, be that the modification of procedures at Westminster ('English votes on English laws') or, on other measures, an English parliament. In other words, there are signs that Englishness is becoming politicised. We argue that these findings matter because the group that choose to emphasise their English over their British identity – and who feel most strongly about the case for reform – are becoming an increasingly important constituency in English political life.

With regards to attitudes towards the impact of Scottish devolution on the way that the UK is governed, as table 5.1 makes clear, there is a clear difference across the English-British 'Moreno' spectrum with those towards the English end more likely to take a negative view than those towards the British end: a finding confirmed when we review responses to the same question by the 'forced choice' identity categories (table 5.2). A particularly interesting – and potentially significant – aspect of table 5.1 is the way that attitudes among those who profess an exclusively English identity are so similar to those who view themselves as 'More English than British'. This replicates findings from the Welsh and Scottish context which suggest that 'nationalist' attitudes are not confined

to only the exclusively Welsh or Scottish ends of the identity spectrum, but are also a characteristic of the more Welsh and Scottish end of the dual identity spectrum. This in turn hints at the potential political implications of the strengthening of English identity within what is still, overall, a context of nested identities.

**Table 5.1**  
Scottish devolution  
'improved' way UK  
governed by national  
identity (Moreno),  
2011 (%)

	English not British	More English than British	Equally English and British	More British than English	British not English
Improved	14	16	15	22	32
<b>Made it worse</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>29</b>
No difference	25	16	22	18	17
Don't know	20	25	28	29	22
<i>N</i>	261	347	511	143	111

Source: FoE 2011

**Table 5.2**  
Scottish devolution  
'improved' way UK  
governed by national  
identity (forced choice),  
2011 (%)

	British	English
Improved	20	15
<b>Made it worse</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>45</b>
No difference	20	14
Don't know	28	26
<i>N</i>	262	305

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Creating the Scottish parliament has improved the way the UK is governed, made it worse, or made no difference?

Tables 5.3 and 5.4 report responses to a question that probes attitudes to relative levels of public spending in Scotland by national identity. Again, it is clear that there are obvious differences in responses along the identity spectrum. Even in a context in which a plurality across all identity categories hold that Scotland gets 'more than its fair share', strong English identifiers are more emphatic in that belief.

**Table 5.3**  
Scotland 'fair share'  
by national identity  
(Moreno), 2011 (%)

	English not British	More English than British	Equally English and British	More British than English	British not English
Scotland gets fair share	19	16	24	25	24
<b>Scotland gets more than fair share</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>38</b>
Scotland gets less than fair share	3	3	3	6	3
Don't know	25	24	34	27	36
<i>N</i>	261	347	511	143	111

Source: FoE 2011

**Table 5.4**  
Scotland 'fair share' by  
national identity (forced  
choice), 2011 (%)

	British	English
Scotland gets fair share	25	15
<b>Scotland gets more than fair share</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>53</b>
Scotland gets less than fair share	3	2
Don't know	33	30
<i>N</i>	262	305

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Would you say that, compared with other parts of the UK, Scotland gets pretty much its fair share of government spending, more than its fair share, or less than its fair share?

It is also clear that the same dynamic is at play when we review responses to a statement that propounds the view that Scottish MPs should not be allowed to vote on laws that affect only England (tables 5.5 and 5.6). As we have already seen, this is a popular proposition in general. Even so, as table 5.5 in particular makes clear, differences in response across the identity spectrum are very striking with ‘English votes on English laws’ enjoying overwhelming support among strong English identifiers. A similar pattern emerges when it comes to support for full fiscal autonomy (or ‘devolution-max’) – see tables 5.7 and 5.8.

**Table 5.5**  
‘English votes on English laws’ by national identity (Moreno), 2011 (%)

	English not British	More Eng. than Brit.	Equally Eng. & Brit.	More Brit. than Eng.	British not English
<b>Agree strongly</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>44</b>
Tend to agree	20	20	33	34	27
Tend to disagree	4	7	7	14	13
Disagree strongly	0	1	1	3	6
Don’t know	4	6	12	8	10
<i>N</i>	261	347	511	143	111

Source: FoE 2011

**Table 5.6**  
‘English votes on English laws’ by national identity (forced choice), 2011 (%)

	British	English
<b>Agree strongly</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>61</b>
Tend to agree	35	24
Tend to disagree	11	7
Disagree strongly	3	1
Don’t know	9	8
<i>N</i>	262	305

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Now that Scotland has its own parliament, Scottish MPs should no longer be allowed to vote in the House of Commons on laws that only affect England.

**Table 5.7**  
Fiscal autonomy by national identity (Moreno), 2011 (%)

	English not British	More Eng. than Brit.	Equally Eng. & Brit.	More Brit. than Eng.	British not English
<b>Agree strongly</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>38</b>
Tend to agree	25	36	42	42	35
Tend to disagree	3	7	8	9	9
Disagree strongly	0	1	1	3	5
Don’t know	5	6	12	10	13
<i>N</i>	261	347	511	143	111

Source: FoE 2011

**Table 5.8**  
Fiscal autonomy by national identity (forced choice), 2011 (%)

	British	English
<b>Agree strongly</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>48</b>
Tend to agree	46	36
Tend to disagree	9	9
Disagree strongly	3	1
Don’t know	11	7
<i>N</i>	262	305

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Now that Scotland has its own parliament, it should pay for its services out of taxes collected in Scotland.

The FoE survey included two questions designed to elicit views on desired constitutional arrangements for England (qua England). In a previous section we argued that responses to these questions strongly suggest that support for current governance arrangements is limited (at around one in four of the electorate) and that, rather, there is support for an ‘English dimension’ to English politics.

In tables 5.9 and 5.10 we report responses by national identity to a question that asked respondents to identify the level of government that they believe should have most influence over the way England is run, in the context of a country characterised by rather different political institutions. Five options were offered: stronger local government; elected regional assemblies; an English parliament; the UK government (that is a continuation of the status quo); and the EU. As is clear, in this context strong English identifiers are more than twice as likely to favour an English parliament as compared to strong British identifiers. Note also that support for the status quo is strongest among the smallest group: those that say they are exclusively British.

**Table 5.9**  
Constitutional preferences by national identity (Moreno), 2011 (%)

	English not British	More Eng. than Brit.	Equally Eng. & Brit.	More Brit. than Eng.	British not English
Stronger local councils	14	12	20	22	22
Elected regional assemblies	13	12	11	17	12
<b>English parliament</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>
UK government	14	18	28	32	33
European Union	0	0	0	1	0
Other	1	1	1	1	2
Don't know	5	7	11	6	10
<i>N</i>	261	347	511	143	111

Source: FoE 2011

**Table 5.10**  
Constitutional preferences by national identity (forced choice), 2011 (%)

	British	English
Stronger local councils	21	13
Elected regional assemblies	11	10
<b>English parliament</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>47</b>
UK government	35	22
European Union	0	0
Other	2	1
Don't know	8	8
<i>N</i>	262	305

Source: FoE 2011

Question: And what if, in the future, there were different types of institutions in England. Which of the following do you think should have the most influence over the way England is run?

Another question offered a different set of options for England, namely a continuation of the status quo, elected regional assemblies, an English parliament, and ‘English votes on English laws’ in Westminster. As table 5.11 makes particularly clear, responses differ markedly by identity profile, with strong English identifiers twice as likely to support one of the English options as compared to strong British identifiers. It seems clear that English national identity is closely associated with support for the institutionalisation of an English dimension to the country’s politics. Or in other words, English identity has political consequences.



**Table 5.11**  
'Best for England'  
by national identity  
(Moreno), 2011 (%)

	English not British	More English than British	Equally English and British	More British than English	British not English
Status quo	13	19	31	21	35
<b>'English votes on English laws'</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>
Regional assemblies	7	5	12	28	8
<b>English parliament</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>
Don't know	9	10	13	17	20
<i>N</i>	61	347	511	143	111

Source: FoE 2011

**Table 5.12**  
'Best for England' by  
national identity (forced  
choice), 2011 (%)

	British	English
Status quo	30	21
<b>'English votes on English laws'</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>45</b>
Regional assemblies	8	6
<b>English parliament</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>
Don't know	17	9
<i>N</i>	262	305

Source: FoE 2011

Question: With all the changes going on in the way different parts of the UK are run, which of the following do you think would be best for England? For England to be governed as it is now with laws made by all MPs in the UK parliament (status quo); with laws made by English MPs in the UK parliament; for each region of England to have its own assembly; for England as a whole to have its own new English parliament with law-making powers.

## 6. CONCLUSION: ENGLAND AND THE PROBLEM OF BRITISH POLITICS

Survey data of the kind reported in this paper are rarely cut and dried. Alternative readings are possible. Nonetheless, we believe that we have presented compelling evidence to suggest that the English electorate is dissatisfied – increasingly so – with current arrangements for the territorial government of the UK in general, and England in particular. Although we remain unconvinced that any particular institutional manifestation yet enjoys truly hegemonic status, we also believe that data presented here supports the claim that the English electorate desires what we have termed an English dimension to the country's institutions of government. Or in other words, it wants to see England more clearly demarcated as a unit from the rest of the UK, not simply by default or omission but by conscious commission. The English electorate also wishes to see political representatives from England (whether they be elected to Westminster or some putative English parliament) rather than elected representatives from the UK as a whole, make decisions for England. Dissatisfaction with the status quo and support for this English dimension is particularly strong among those with a strong sense of English identity, a group that represents a growing proportion of the population.

It would seem, therefore, that after many years in which prophecies of an English awakening appeared more a case of wishful thinking (or scaremongering), a stirring is finally in evidence. After centuries of being subsumed within the wider state, England is re-emerging as a political community. This is not simply as an unintended consequence of devolution, but it is a development – even a political project (if that is not too portentous a phrase) – that enjoys significant levels of popular support in a country that appears to be increasingly conscious of a distinct national identity that is not simply reducible to Britain and Britishness. More significantly, perhaps, the strengthening and politicisation of English identity is taking place in the absence of any formal political mobilisation. Englishness, in other words, has a momentum of its own.

This development clearly represents a serious challenge – or, more correctly, a series of challenges – both socially and politically. As we have already made clear, while English identity is shared geographically across the territory, encompassing even those areas with a strong sense of 'regional identity', and while it is also shared broadly across social groups, there remains one significant outlier: members of ethnic minorities currently tend to remain significantly more British and less English in terms of their sense of national identity. This is not, in our view, an insurmountable difficulty, and there is tentative evidence that attitudes within ethnic minority communities are beginning to consider English identity more favourably than in the past, but it is clearly a matter on which proponents of an English dimension need to reflect. And in fairness, a number are doing just that.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps more intractable are the practical difficulties that would inevitably arise in the context of any genuine attempt to introduce an institutionalised English dimension to the country's politics. 'English votes on English laws' may well resonate as a slogan, but as many have previously noted, there are formidable practical barriers to its introduction. And even were these barriers overcome, such an arrangement would remain vulnerable to the 'doomsday scenario' of a UK general election resulting in one party enjoying a majority of seats in England but another party forming the government because of results elsewhere across the state. This is indeed what occurred in 1964 and October 1974. Any recurrence in the context of 'English votes on English laws' would be a recipe for constitutional chaos. That said, however, we would hazard that it is equally doubtful whether the current

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11 See for instance Mark Perryman (ed) *Breaking up Britain: Four nations after a union* and 'English First, British Second' by Gareth Young: <http://toque.co.uk/english-first-british-second>.

arrangements could themselves survive the legitimacy crisis that would inevitably develop should we see a repeat of the 1964 and 1974 results. The argument that reform of this nature is too difficult is likely to evaporate in the face of English public opinion.

Similarly, doubts have also been voiced about the difficulties associated with the establishment of an English parliament. In particular, is it realistic to expect such a body to remain in some sense subservient to a reformed and very much weakened UK state?

Yet despite such difficulties it appears increasingly unlikely that the status quo will remain tenable for much longer. Events north of the border will of course have an impact on the English debate. Should the Scottish people vote for independence, then a new constitutional settlement for England and the other nations of the UK would urgently be needed. If Scotland is offered and then chooses 'devolution-max', the West Lothian question becomes even more egregious. Surely it is impossible to think of Scottish MPs being returned to Westminster on the same basis as their English counterparts if Scotland has something approaching full fiscal autonomy. But even if Scotland chooses to reject independence and 'devolution-max' and instead opts for the status quo, the Future of England survey suggests that the rise in English sentiment against the current arrangements will prove hard to resist. It would be folly to believe that an answer to the English question will simply arise as a by-product of developments in Scotland. However important the Scottish debate is, it must not be allowed to distract attention from a meaningful public conversation about the future of shape of English governance.

Standing in the way of such a conversation is a British political class which has, on the whole, failed to engage seriously with the changing attitudes that we have traced in this paper. Their reluctance to address the new politics of Englishness perhaps explains why the English public have little faith that an English dimension will be forthcoming. One indication is the responses to a question (table 6.1) which asked respondents which level of government they expected to have most influence over decisions affecting standards of living in 10 years time. Despite the desire for an English dimension, only one in 10 expect that an English layer of government will have significant influence on this issue.

**Table 6.1**  
In 10 years, standards of living of people in England will depend most on decisions taken at which level of government? 2011 (%)

Level of government	
EU	29
UK	37
English	12
Regional	6
Don't know	15
N	1507

Source: FoE 2011

Question: In 10 years, do you think that the standards of living of people in England will depend most on decisions taken at the UK level, decisions taken at the English level, decisions taken at the regional level within England, or decisions taken at the European level?

Even more significant was the response to a question that asked respondents which political party in their view 'best stands up for the interests of England'. As is made clear in table 6.2, a (narrow) plurality supported the view that no party does this.

To the extent that one agrees that 'English interests' require championing, it is hard to dissemble from the view that they are not sufficiently well represented in the current political system. Unlike Scotland and Wales, there is no significant political party promoting England as a locus and focus of political life. That the tiny English Democrats are currently absorbing members from a disintegrating British National Party makes clear that they will not plug that particular gap.<sup>12</sup> UKIP's recent conversion to the cause of an

<sup>12</sup> For example, two very prominent former BNP activists – Chris Beverley and Eddy Butler – are now members of the English Democrats, the latter following an unsuccessful leadership bid against the BNP's Nick Griffin in 2010. Despite their membership of the English Democrats, Beverley and Butler continue to work for BNP MEP, Andrew Brons. See [http://andrewbrons.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=71&Itemid=120](http://andrewbrons.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=71&Itemid=120) (accessed 5 January 2012)

English parliament suggests they hope to broaden their appeal in England, but they can draw little encouragement from table 6.2.

**Table 6.2**  
Which political party  
best stands up for the  
interests of England?  
2011 (%)

Party	
British National Party	4
Conservatives	20
English Democrats	2
Green Party	2
Labour	21
Liberal Democrats	4
UK Independence Party	9
'I do not think that any party stands up for the interests of England'	23
Don't know	15
N	1507

Source: FoE 2011

Question: Which party, if any, of the following parties do you think best stands up for the interests of England?

As for the mainstream political parties, Labour appears caught between the Scylla of the failure of its English regionalist project and the Charybdis of its dependency on its block of Scottish and Welsh MPs. The result is a party resolutely in denial about the 'English question'. This denial has most recently taken the form of the championing of 'city regions' in England, a proposal that, however valid as a means of improving government within England, is irrelevant to the question of how the government of England as a whole relates to that of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats, while ostensibly a federalist party and, therefore, seemingly well-placed to capitalise on support for change to the territorial status quo, are in fact still wedded to an English regionalist approach to UK federalism. They certainly show little appetite to engage seriously with England qua England.

As already mentioned, the Conservatives have long championed some version of 'English votes on English laws'. Yet, there is cause to doubt the seriousness of that commitment, not least because the party is continuing to oppose changes in Scotland and Wales that might make 'English votes on English laws' a more viable proposition. Recall that the operation of the Barnett formula means that any funding commitment entered into for England has implications for the devolved territories. This in turn gives MPs from those territories a legitimate interest in voting on 'English' matters. So any serious attempt to operationalise 'English votes on English laws' would surely require the disentangling of financial arrangements of the devolved territories from those of England through some form of fiscal autonomy or radically revised funding arrangements. Yet the Conservatives remain adamantly opposed to such reform. In this case, the party's longstanding opposition to the further devolution of power to Scotland and Wales apparently trumps its championing of English 'rights'.

The fate of the UK Coalition agreement pledge to establish a commission to consider the West Lothian question is another indication that this is an issue that all the mainstream political parties, including the Conservatives, find easier to ignore: there has been a palpable lack of urgency about redeeming the pledge. Moreover the commission's membership and narrow terms of reference ensure that this will be a limited, largely technocratic exercise. It is certainly very hard to imagine how this could trigger the fundamental, tectonic changes to the government of the UK that would be required if the English dimension is to be taken seriously.

Ignoring the developments highlighted in this paper – growing popular dissatisfaction with the territorial status quo and support for an English dimension to the institutions of government – will not make them disappear. Especially given that they are buttressed, not only by the workings of a system of asymmetric devolution that ensures that a de facto

English polity is emerging ever more clearly into view, but also by changes in patterns of national identity. The latter are to be sure particularly consequential. Despite the exhortations of successive governments that have focused exclusively on Britishness, at the popular level it is Englishness that resonates most. These developments matter. In our view, the main problem is not that the English question is now finally being asked by the country's electorate, but rather the failure of the British political class to take it, and them, seriously.